

VZCZCXRO4448  
RR RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHDBU #1561/01 3041626  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 311626Z OCT 07  
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1247  
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 2025  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1998  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1904  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 1263  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3153  
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2279  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2301  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1832  
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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1790  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2039  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK NY  
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC 0193

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001561

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECIN](#) [ELTN](#) [ETRD](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: OSCE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION CONFERENCE IN DUSHANBE

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11. (U) Summary: Delegations to the OSCE Central Asian Regional Transportation Conference in Dushanbe October 23-24 agreed to promote streamlined transit routes and enhance public-private partnerships in the transportation sector. The joint statement released by the delegations underlined the role of the OSCE in helping countries coordinate and share expertise in procedures and regulatory frameworks. Presenters noted that Central Asia faces major geographical and physical barriers, but that administrative barriers are more important to overcome. Tajikistan proposed creating an international center in Dushanbe to improve regional harmonization. Uzbekistan fully participated in the conference, while Turkmenistan remained outside the boundaries of regional cooperation. End Summary.

Conference on the Prospects for the Development of Trans-Asian and Eurasian Transit Transportation through Central Asia till the Year 2015

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12. (U) Delegations from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, joined representatives from the OSCE, UN development agencies, international development banks, chambers of commerce and private organizations to discuss regional transit and transportation issues. Presenters discussed road, rail, and air transport, and the particular challenges of landlocked countries. The conference highlighted the OSCE's continuing role in bringing together regional representatives to discuss transport issues.

13. (U) Tajik Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi welcomed

delegates to the conference, which Tajikistan had pushed the OSCE to hold in Dushanbe for over two years. Presentations by government representatives helped delegates assess gaps and priorities in infrastructure, regulatory cooperation, customs and border control policies. The polished Kazakh presentation underscored Kazakhstan's leadership potential in terms of regional development.

#### Fewer Infrastructure Projects - Better Border Procedures

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14. (U) Several speakers noted that streamlining border and customs procedures would have greater effect than big infrastructure projects. According to the World Bank's "Doing Business" survey, customs and border clearance takes 8-11 days in Central Asia compared to 3-5 days in Europe. The Afghan representatives noted the difficulties Afghan businesspeople face getting visas to Tajikistan, while the Tajik Drug Control Agency noted the rising level of Afghan narcotics flowing through Tajikistan and the need for improved border security.

15. (U) Several multilateral organizations noted that joining international conventions can help push countries into reforming their transit regulations. Robert Nowak, of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, noted that all former Soviet countries except Moldova, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan have signed the 1982 International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods controlling border crossing. However, a representative from the American Chamber of Commerce in Georgia argued that internal pressure and political will was far more important as a catalyst for reforms in Georgia.

16. (U) Speakers from the World Customs Organization, the International Road Transport Union, and the OSCE described funding and training opportunities for regional countries. A

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representative of the new four-year USAID Regional Trade Liberalization and Customs Project asserted the need for risk assessment and border point audits in order to facilitate border procedures. The Asian Development Bank-led Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation program noted its upcoming November 2-3 Dushanbe conference on transport and infrastructure issues.

17. (U) Comment: The event highlighted the important OSCE role in bringing together Central Asian countries on trade and transit issues; whether the governments of Central Asia will use these opportunities to improve transport development remains unclear. Political differences (as highlighted by the mutual criticism of Afghan and Tajik representatives in para 4), lack of technical capacity, and corruption hamper coordination between agencies and countries. In a hopeful moment for Central Asian cooperation, the Uzbek representative had the last word at the conference, thanking the Tajik hosts for putting on a fine event. End Comment.  
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